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ABSTRACT

As adolescents enter high school in the ninth grade, they experience a transition unlike any previous school experience, and it exacts its toll from unprepared, unmotivated, or unwary students. An examination of achievement test averages across grades 1 through 12 for students in the Austin Independent School District (AISD) in Austin, Texas revealed a noticeable drop from grade 8 to grade 9, followed by a rise in grade 10. Further investigation revealed that enrollment was dramatically higher at ninth grade than at any other grade. Twenty-two percent of all ninth graders were found to be repeating their freshman year. It was found that over 800 students in the AISD dropped out of school during their freshman year. Those who stayed in school missed more classes than students in any other grade. Compared to other grades, more ninth graders misbehaved and required disciplinary action. In addition to problems of low attendance and discipline, one-half of AISD ninth graders received at least one failing grade each 6 weeks. In every area investigated, ninth grade presented the greatest challenge to students, parents, and educators. These groups must work together to increase the success of all ninth graders. (NB)

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CAUTION: HAZARDOUS GRADE

NINTH GRADERS AT RISK

AISD EDUCATORS:

High school is a time dreamed about and anticipated by most students, but the reality of high school confronts them abruptly in the ninth grade. Ninth grade is different from any previous school experience, and it exacts its toll from unprepared, unmotivated, or unwary teenagers.

This brief summary is a caution sign. You will be alerted here to the hazardous situation ahead; however, yours is the responsibility for preventive action. The bright spot at the end of the tunnel is that students who successfully pass through the hazards of the ninth grade increase their chances of finishing high school with each subsequent year they complete.

Glynn Ligon, Director
Department of Management Information

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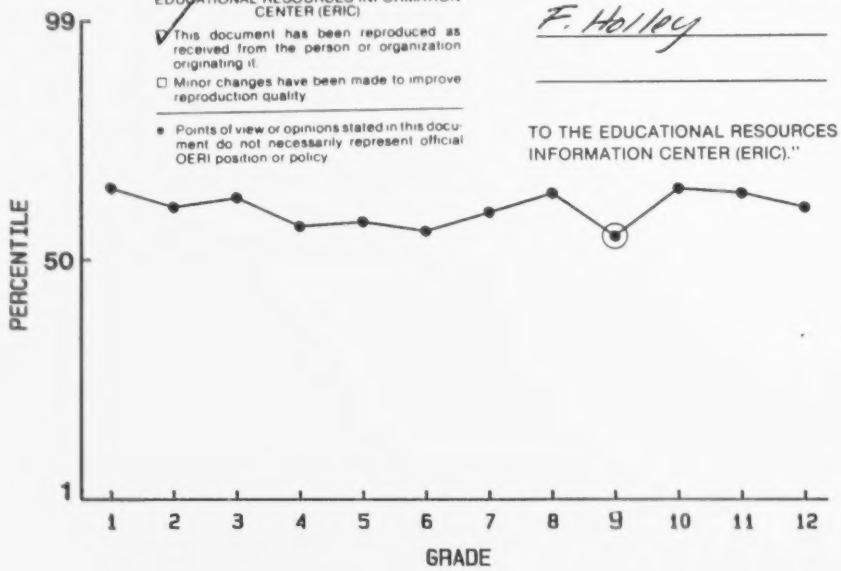
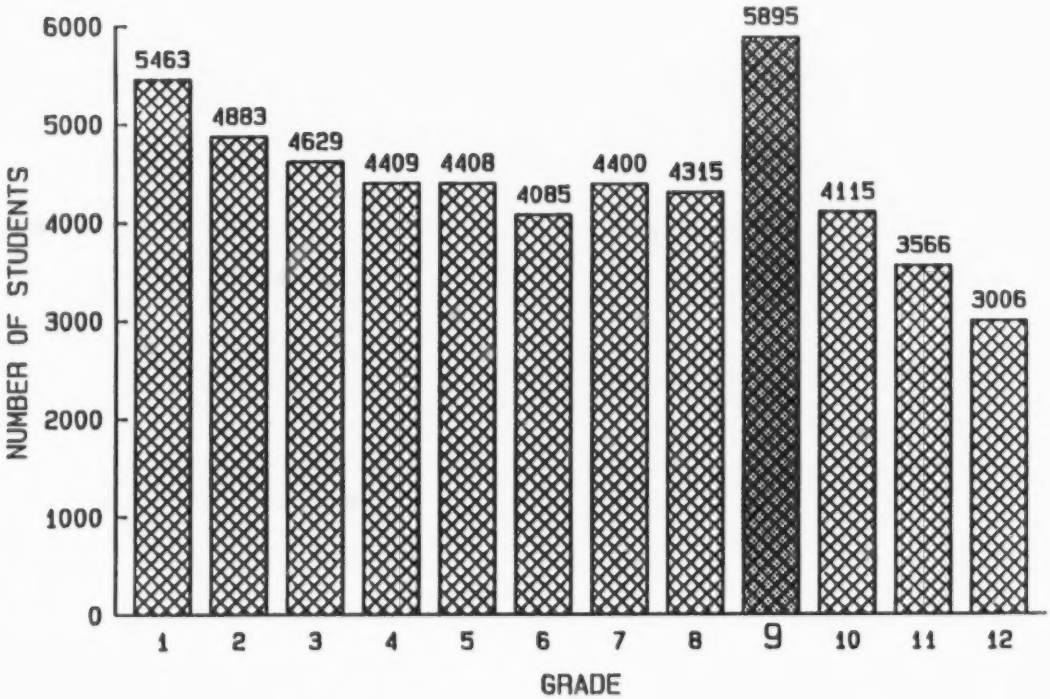
We began wondering just how difficult the ninth-grade experience is when we looked at **achievement test averages** across grades 1 through 12. A noticeable drop is evident from grade 8 to grade 9, then a rise occurs in grade 10.

Why is there such a dramatic dip in achievement at grade 9?



Our first investigations led to the finding that **enrollment** is dramatically higher at the ninth-grade level than at any other grade.



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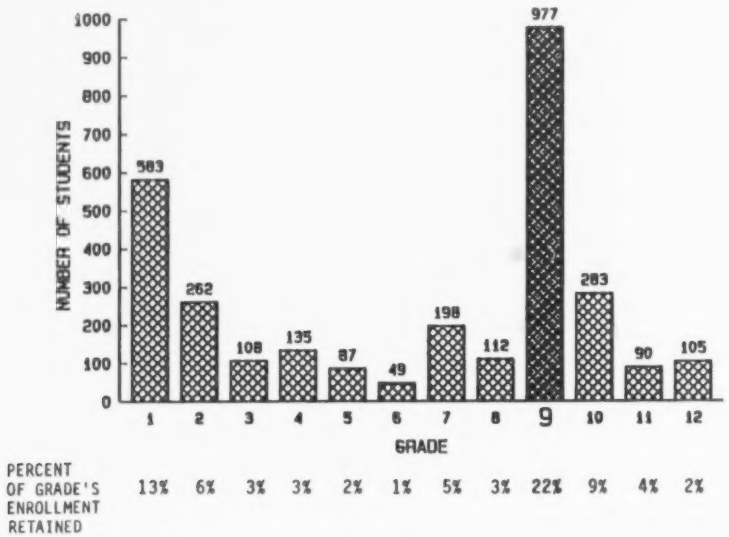
Could this higher enrollment be a result of **retainees**? Yes! A sobering 22% of all ninth graders are repeating that grade.



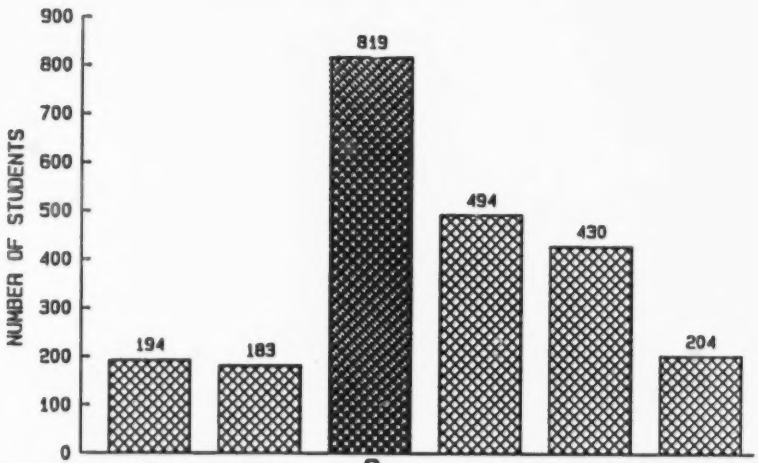
However, further analysis of ninth-grade achievement scores showed that if retainees are excluded from the average, **ninth grade is still the lowest achieving grade at the secondary level.** The high number of retainees in the ninth grade contributes to the dip in achievement, but does not account for all of it.

Indeed, as we explored other student data, we found dramatic differences at grade 9. Certainly the high number of retainees influences these data, but this cannot discount the fact that ninth grade **is** a hazardous time, during which over 900 students fail to gain passage to the next grade.

Dr. John Ellis, AISD Superintendent, has often said that there are three elements of success in public education. **Students must:** 1. **Attend,**
2. **Behave, and**
3. **Learn.**

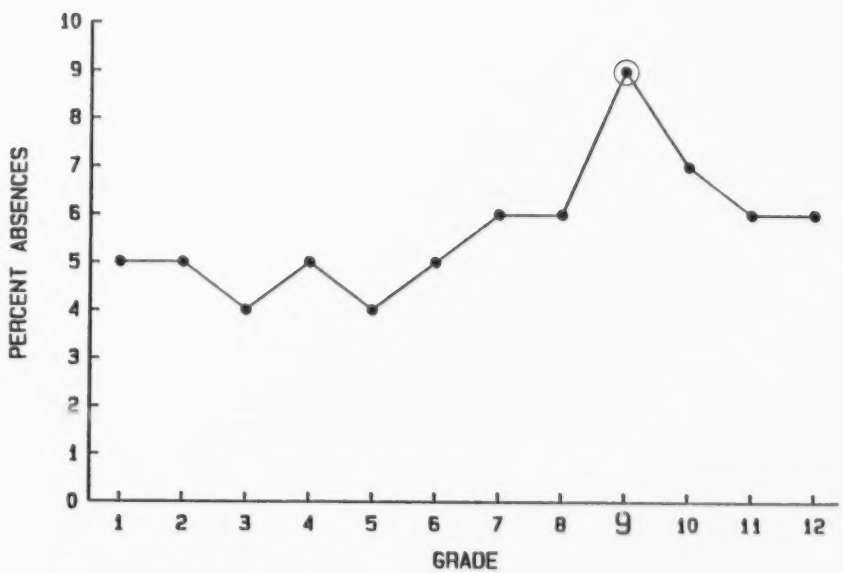
DO NINTH GRADERS ATTEND ?

Over 800 students **drop out** of school during their ninth-grade year.



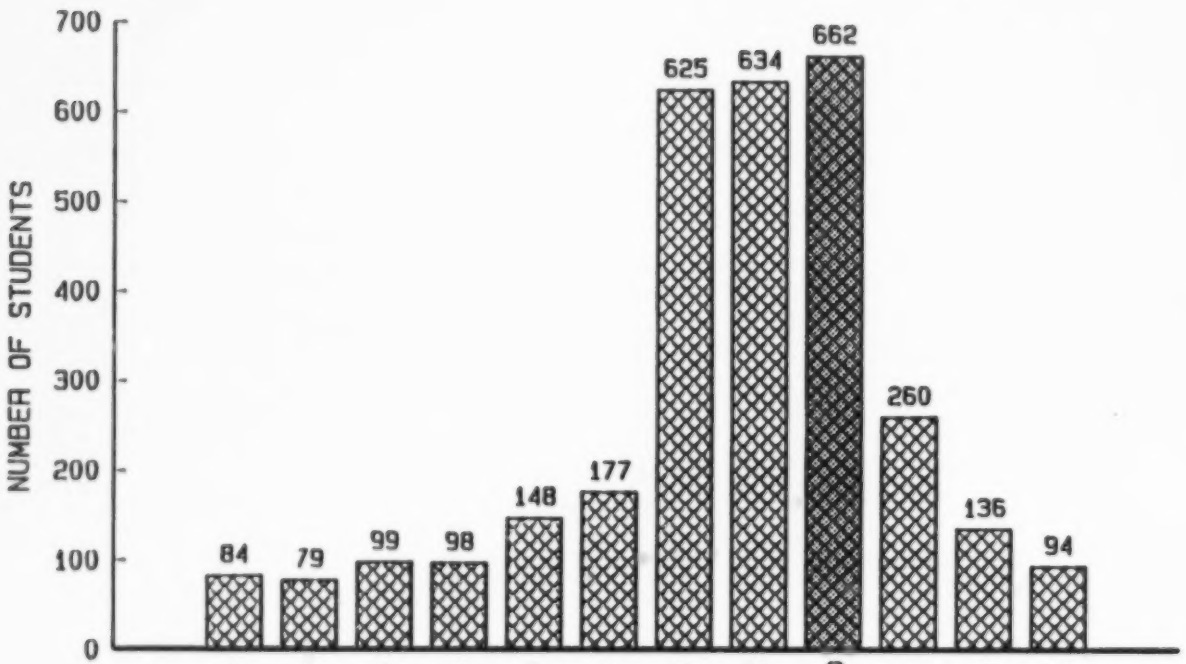
PERCENT OF GRADE'S ENROLLMENT WHO DROP OUT	3.9%	3.7%	13.0%	11.1%	12.0%	6.1%

Those ninth graders who do not drop out during the year miss more classes than students in any other grade. Nine percent of ninth graders are **absent** on an average school day.



DO NINTH GRADERS BEHAVE?

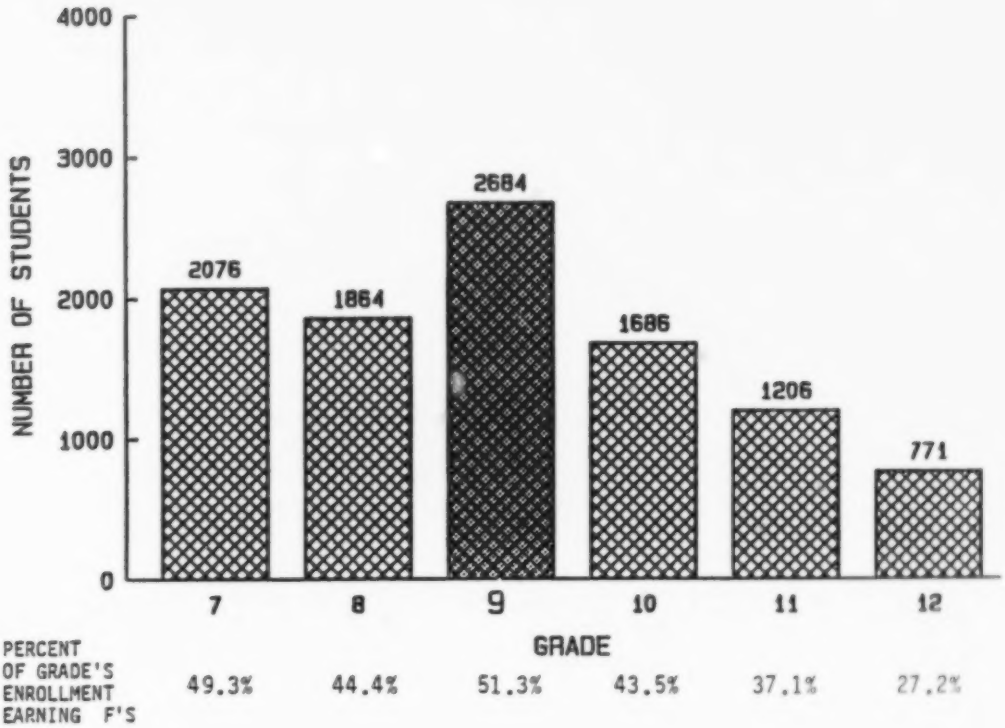
When ninth graders are attending school, more of them misbehave and require **disciplinary action** than any other grade.



PERCENT OF GRADE'S ENROLLMENT WHO ARE DISCIPLINED	1.5%	1.6%	2.1%	2.2%	3.4%	4.3%	14.2%	14.7%	11.2%	6.3%	3.8%	3.1%

DO NINTH GRADERS LEARN ?

One consequence of low attendance and discipline problems can be that students earn **failing grades.**
Half of AISD ninth graders take home at least one failing grade each six weeks.



These failure data combined with lower achievement test scores shown on page 1 appear to indicate that the challenge of ninth grade **does affect** students' learning.

SUMMARY

Clearly, ninth grade is the moment of truth for many students. We often think of the twelfth grade as the toughest, but this report shows that many students never make it that far. The junior high years are seen as the time requiring the biggest adjustments, and in fact discipline is a greater problem for junior high students than for most others. However, in every area investigated here, grade 9 presents the greatest challenge to students, parents, and educators. Indeed, for every four new ninth graders, there is one ninth-grade student who failed to earn enough credits to gain tenth-grade status.

These comments are not intended to imply that educators have failed ninth graders. The indicators would be even more alarming if not for the current efforts of the secondary school staff.

This report calls for awareness of the hazardous grade ahead for students entering grade 9. We hope that AISD educators will be alert to these challenges, and can involve students and parents in working to increase the success of all students in grade 9.

TECHNICAL NOTES

The sources for the data reported here are listed below. The school year reported varies, depending on the availability of data.

Dropouts. Preliminary 1984-85 counts are reported in Appendix K of ORE publication number 84.20.

Achievement. ITBS, grades 1 - 8; TAP grades 9 - 12: composite median percentiles as reported in ORE publication number 85.58.

Membership. October 11, 1985, as reported in the 1985-86 Superintendent's Report to TEA.

Attendance. Average daily attendance for the entire 1985-86 school year as recorded in the official attendance file in the Office of Student Records and Reports.

Discipline. Reported incidents as reported by the Office of Student Affairs for the 1984-85 school year.

Retainees. Counts and percentages for 1985-86 as reported in the AISD Needs Assessment for 1986-87, ORE publication number 85.36.

Grades. 1985-86 statistics compiled by the Department of Management Information from the Student Grade Reporting file.

"Percentage of Grade's Enrollment" is taken from each source document, not calculated for the graphic based upon the counts shown in the membership graphic.

DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

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Office of Research and Evaluation
Publication Number 85.68

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